

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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NEWS FROM ABROAD



Should snow geese (left) and mandarin ducks (right), endangered in their native lands, be on the death list?

Ducking the issue of racial purity

Bitter disagreements are breaking out among conservation groups in Britain over plans to keep alien bird species from breeding by shooting them as they sit on their nests or graze in parks.

Already on the Government's death list are the ruddy duck and Canada goose, but purists want others added, including the snow goose, bar-headed goose, mandarin ducks and parakeets.

Some delegates at the British Ornithological Union's meeting in March called for the shooting of all species imported into Britain. The proposals were defeated but the debate continues. One opponent, Dr. Richard Ryder, said last week: "If you shot everything that arrived in Britain in the last 5,000 years, there'd be nothing left."

The current row began because of the intended fate of the ruddy duck, whose sexual habits are endangering the purity of the white-headed duck. It does not occur in Britain, but resident ruddies go to Spain for the spring and impregnate the locals, creating a hybrid and threatening the rarer species.

As part of a Europe-wide effort, Britain has undertaken to try to slaughter 3,500 ruddy ducks believed

to be resident. The latest government-backed plan is to wait until spring and shoot them as they nest on their eggs.

But Paul Evans, chairman of the British Association of Nature Conservationists, said: "This slaughter is obscene in the name of racial purity. Using public money to massacre ducks on their nests seems to be a lowdown dirty trick."

He added that ruddy ducks were well established and it was unlikely they could be wiped out. The public's trust in conservationists would be diminished by what many would regard as a meaningless slaughter.

Canada geese, another alien, introduced to Britain by Charles II, were encouraged to breed in the 1950s so they could be shot by sportsmen. However, the geese, not being frightened by man, refused to take off. The sportsmen felt unable to shoot a sitting target, so the geese survived to breed in huge numbers and moved into the nation's parks.

Unfortunately they eat and excrete more than any other bird, causing some nuisance problems. They also damage crops, so ways of getting rid of them are being devised.

Dr. Baz Hughes, from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust in Gloucestershire, heads the ruddy

extermination programme. He says 19,000 white-headed ducks survive, while there are 500,000 ruddy ducks in their native North America. He has asked landowners in the West Midlands, which has lakes where ruddy ducks breed, if they will co-operate in the shooting next spring. He said: "It is being done to save another species. Where an alien does not cause conflict with another species, it is a different problem."

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) agrees with the plan but believes other exotics deserve protection. For example the mandarin duck, an endangered species in its native China and Japan, has around 4,000 birds in Britain breeding in the wild — one-third of their world population live here. Chris Harbard, from the RSPB, said: "Purists would shoot it but it may be the last refuge for this duck if it disappears in the Far East. This is a complex matter. Our policy is to take each case on its merits."

Other geese breeding in Britain are the North American snow goose, with 182 in the wild, 85 bar-headed geese from the Himalayas, and 900 barnacle geese, from the Arctic fringes.

*Courtesy : Guardian Weekly,
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Vol. 35 No. 6 Nov / Dec 1995

CONTENTS

Editorial

- ☐ Second Biannual Conference of the OSI
- ☐ Whitenecked Stork
- ☐ Whitebellied Sea Eagle
- ☐ Whitewinged Tit
- ☐ Madhavaram Jheel, Madras
- ☐ Finally



Articles

- ☐ Trapping Hill Birds, by Rajat Bhargava
- ☐ Birdwatching in South Andamans, by V. Santharam
- ☐ Birds of Nauli Campus of University of Horticulture and Forestry, Solan, H.P., by Dr. M.L. Narang and Arun Pratap Singh

Short Notes

- ☐ Madhavaram Jheel - Developmental Plans, by Preston Ahimaz
- ☐ Greyheaded Flycatchers and Large Crowned Leaf Warblers, by Praveen J
- ☐ Use of old Barbet Hole, Successive Broods and Mimicry by Magpie Robin, by Mosaddique Umar
- ☐ Sooty Tern in Thattakkadu in Western Ghats, by Dr. R. Sugathan, K.C. Jacob, and Aby P. Varghese
- ☐ Status of the Woolly-necked Stork in Assam, by Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury

Correspondence

- ☐ Whitewinged Tit and Great Tit, by L. Shyamal
- ☐ Rare Occurrence of White-naped Tit in Dharwad, by Dr. J.C. Uttangi
- ☐ Rufousvented Prinia in Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam, by Maan Barua
- ☐ Great Black Woodpecker in Kodagu Dist., by Lt. Gen. B.C. Nanda (Retd.)
- ☐ Comments on some Contributions to Newsletter, by Lavkumar Khacher
- ☐ Fifteen years and still going strong, by M.S. Kulkarni
- ☐ White Storks in Belgaum City, by N.R. Sant
- ☐ Need for a new Guide Book, by Werner W.K. Peters

Review

- ☐ Environment and Ornithology in India, by Prakash Gole

Announcements

- ☐ Wilderness India Research Expedition, by Dr. Kumar Ghorpade
- ☐ Salim Ali International Award for Nature Conservation

Editorial

The Second Biannual Conference of the OSI was held at the I.A.R.I. Pusa, New Delhi, between 14th-16th November. As always, it is pleasant and useful meeting old friends and making new acquaintances. But one sympathises with the organisers, because so many things go wrong for no fault of theirs. People (even Convenors of Sessions) do not turn up in time; speakers do not respond to the Chairman's warning bell and go on and on; members from the audience do not ask relevant questions but make long statements which are not quite pertinent to the topic; and of course there is always the odd character whose unwanted interruptions are rather annoying. However, Asha Chandola Saklani and her team from Garhwal did very well, and we must express our gratitude to them for being so actively concerned with the welfare of the delegates.

VVIPs on the stage are always welcome because they help to promote what we lesser mortals are struggling to achieve. So we were happy to have Dr. B.P. Singh (Director, IARI, who generously allowed OSI the use of their excellent facilities), Dr. Zohoor Qasim of the Planning Commission, Dr. T.N. Khoshoo, and Prof. R.N. Saxena on the dais.

While sophisticated research is necessary to help us understand the mysterious ways of nature, our priority has to be the saving of the natural world from further harm. It is very encouraging to find that Associations like for example, the Mandar Nature Club (Anand Chikitsalaya Road, Bhagalpur 812 002, Bihar), have succeeded in establishing the Udhwa Lake Bird Sanctuary in Bihar. They have been successful because of the intelligent propaganda they mounted in favour of conservation, and more importantly, because they found alternative sources of livelihood for the fishermen whose activities were checked when the bird sanctuary was established. One of their members, Arvind Mishra, has produced a Wader's Taxonomic Identification Booklet which might prove to be a useful effort. Our "experts" may probably like to correspond with him and make their suggestions.

The programme, Environment and Birds, was broad enough to accommodate anything to do with avians, but for those who were not present I will list the headings of the various Symposia and Round Tables :

- * Birds in Biotechnology and Biodiversity Management
- * Behaviour
- * Avian Conservation
- * Bird Acoustics
- * Environmental Physiology
- * Geese and Cranes
- * Wetland Birds
- * Bird Migration
- * Biological Clock in Birds

- Shrikes in N.E. India
- Avian Biodiversity
- Directory of Indian Ornithologists
- Employment opportunities for ornithologists and conservationists
- Ecology
- The Avian Pineal : Transducer of Environmental Information?
- Conservation of Pheasants
- Agricultural Ornithology
- Indian Bird Atlas Project

The Round Table in which I was involved as Convenor was Employment Opportunities for Ornithologists and Conservationists, and I will write about it in a subsequent issue.

Serious birdwatchers may be interested in getting a copy of the abstracts, and on request perhaps our Secretary General will oblige.

Prinias

I admire people who take the trouble to pin down a species, on the basis of their appearance, distribution, habits and habitat. I refer to the article in this issue on the rufousvented prinia (*Prinia burnesii*). There are a dozen prinias among the confusing group of 95 or so warblers in India. Most of them are brown and grey, and several have the white eye stripe (*supercilium*) of the same design. The ashy wren warbler is a great favourite because it is so friendly and its loud call from the top of a shrub makes identification easy. The orphan warbler (*Sylvia hortensis*) and the white-throat (*Sylvia communis*) are not too difficult to recognise. We caught a great many in mist nets in Kutch, during a BNHS bird migration survey. In the case of warblers, their calls are a great aid to their identity. Blyth's reed warbler, for example, and the Indian great reed warbler (*Acrocephalus stentorius*) give themselves away when they "open" their beaks. To add to our problems many prinias have very different breeding and non-breeding plumage.

Whitenecked Stork

The report by Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury about the presence of a large flock of white-necked storks in Assam is very cheering for these birds are never known to occur in such large flocks. Many of us have seen the single pair in Periyar. In *Birds of Periyar*, Andrew Robertson and M.C.A. Jackson say : "First recorded in 1961 (MCAJ) since when a resident pair have nested high up in the large silk cotton tree at the Thekkady boat landing virtually every year". But the

authors do refer to other areas where 9 to 12 birds have been seen. I am surprised that there is no mention of this species in *A Book of Kerala Birds* by K.K. Neelakantan and others.

Whitebellied Sea Eagles

Mr. Hariprasad has apparently seen a group of over a hundred whitebellied sea eagles on an island (2 hours away by motor boat, in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Karwar). This is an amazing finding because it has been assumed that these birds are solitary nesters. A photograph in confirmation is expected.

Whitewinged Tit

Is the whitewinged tit (*Parus nuchalis*) extending its range? The two articles by L. Shyamal and Dr. Uttangi J.C. seem to suggest that this may be happening. In his *Birds of Kutch*, Salim Ali writes : "The (nesting) season is July and August ... Two found by me at Chaduva were both about 4' up in a Salvadora and Babool trunk respectively. From the first nest (August 20) which was under construction and empty was obtained a large tangle of kutch sewing thread with a needle attached!"

The Madhavaram Jheel, Madras

During the Asian Waterfowl Census, South Asia, V Gurusami and others undertook a count of the birds on this Jheel on 22-1-95. They were able to count 132 pheasant tailed jacanas, which is possibly the highest congregation of this species on record. The report by WWF (TN Branch) reproduced this issue indicated the dangers ahead for this unique habitat, and we hope that the T.N. Veterinary and Animal Sciences University will refrain from any action which will affect bird life adversely. The response of the T N VASU to the recommendations made by WWF suggests that they do understand that conservation and development are two sides of the same coin. In their letter to WWF they say that the various suggestions will not be disregarded. "The deepening of the bed of the lake will take place in a manner which it would not cause any adverse effect on the breeding of pheasant tailed jacanas". It is difficult to believe though, that bulldozers trundling into fragile areas will do no harm.

Finally . . .

Season's Greetings, and hope you will continue to send your contributions to the Newsletter.



Trapping Hill Birds — A Vanishing Art

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Since I was in class III, I was fascinated by birds and as a hobby kept birds like budgerigars. I got into this pastime since at the back of my house there was a community of bird exporters, dealers and trappers for whom birds meant a livelihood. Being near to them and

watching them for more than a decade, I learnt many interesting facts about bird trapping and bird keeping.

Meerut in Uttar Pradesh being a major bird export centre before the ban on bird trade in 1991, I had a chance to see endless numbers of birds for years and got most attracted to the group of softbills which were the most conspicuous birds in appearance with beautiful colourations. Softbill is a term

used by aviculturists and refer to those species which are insectivorous, frugivorous or nectar feeders in their dietary habits. As they are not granivorous they do not have the hard, nut cracking and seed eating bill and therefore referred as softbills. These are mostly hill birds which were in great demand among specialised avicularists throughout the world. Some Indian softbill species are chloropsis, shama, pekin robin (red-billed leothrix), redwhiskered bulbul, yuhinas, thrushes, redstart, tits, magpies, and jays. Being excellent songsters they were preferred cage birds and regularly exported.

After my repeated request to trappers, I managed a trip to Chalti, near Tanakpur in district Pithoragarh with a veteran hill bird trapper to see the various methods of catching these birds. The most important tool to catch softbills in the hills is the jungle owlet (*Glaucidium radiatum*). The first day was spent in searching and catching the owlet. It is first baited with a mice or a small bird which is placed between two slender twigs coated with *lhasa*, *Lhasa* is a sticky substance prepared from latex of *Ficus* trees. As soon as the owl tries to catch the bait, *lhasa*-coated sticks fall over it and glue its feathers. The trapper quickly takes it out and methodically removes the glue from its feathers. Its eyelids are stitched so that the owlet cannot see or attack the decoy bird. It is fed at intervals so that it remains active and it is made accustomed to sit on a perch. This species is more preferred than the barred owlet (*Glaucidium cuculoides*) and spotted owlet (*Athene brama*). I had asked the reasons for such a preference which though not scientifically verified, trappers attribute it to the bird being more nocturnal than other species and also to it being more conspicuous because of its rufous primaries.

The theory behind using an owl decoy for catching birds in the hills is that birds perch normally on tall vegetation and cannot easily be reached by conventional bamboo rods (which are 10-15 metres long) or cannot be caught by nets. Secondly hill birds are normally shy, arboreal and found in dense thickets. As most birds in the softbill category are not granivorous and therefore are loath to come down to the ground in large flocks, nets are not used in the hills. Also as mountainous terrain is difficult for searching and trapping of birds, it further eliminates the use of nets such as the funnel nets which require driving the birds into the nets. The use of the owl on a perch is important as in the mountains, the birds to be caught are slightly shyer of human beings than in the plains and therefore more difficult to approach. Given the inaccessibility of the birds of the high perches, trappers have to rely on decoy to bring the birds to a trappable level.

The other important tool for the hill trapper is the *tatiya* or a shield of leaves that is used as a camouflage for the trapper. The leaves are strung around an oval-shaped frame made out of bending mulberry stems or cane. The trapper ties this structure through his neck looking out from the two holes left for the eyes. When doing the trapping the trappers do not move the structure even slightly as this might cause alarm among the birds to be trapped.

The use of decoys in catching birds is a very specialised art. when a trapper spots or hears a mixed hunting flock of preferred species such as white-eyes, tits, sunbirds, etc, he

displays the decoy owl and from behind his shield of leaves mimics the distress calls of the species that he wishes to trap. When wild birds attracted by these calls come nearer to investigate, they see the owl and presume that it is the cause for the alarm and therefore set about to mob it. This is when the trapper uses his *lhasa* stick and catches the birds.

Other preferred decoy species are the grey tit (*Parus major*) and yellow-cheeked tit (*Parus xanthogenys*). These are very vocal when caught and are tied near the decoy owl causing them to cry out loud and long, attracting bulbuls, thrushes, sunbirds, etc. Certain birds if caught in this manner can aid attracting certain other species. For example the white-crested laughing thrush (*Garrulax leucolophus*) is useful in attracting white throated laughing thrush (*Garrulax albogularis*), Himalayan tree pie (*Dendrocitta formosae*) and green magpie (*Cissa chinensis*). The latter in turn is good for catching blue magpie (*Cissa erythrorhyncha*). Similarly the common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) is used for attracting black throated jay (*Garrulax lanceolatus*). While trapping, the birds are kept in a cloth tied to the waist of the trapper and finally transferred to bamboo cages.

For trapping sibilas and chloropsis, the trapper takes recourse to a specific tree called *Churaa* or *churri* which has a nectar yielding inflorescence or the wild plantain species. Even though chloropsis are territorial birds under normal circumstances, these birds congregate on these tree species in medium-sized flocks which can then be caught with medium sized poles.

Streaked spiderhunters (*Arachnothera magna*) are also caught on wild banana trees in the same way. The use of specific plant species to catch specific birds shows a great understanding of habits of the birds by the trappers. They are also well aware about the home range and territories of certain species. For species such as white-capped redstart (*Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*), plumbaceous redstart (*Rhyacornis fuliginosus*), blue whistling thrush (*Mylophonus caeruleus*) and shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*), a different technique is adopted. Two pliable sticks are fashioned into an arc and then bound together at right angles forming a sort of dome. The sticks are coated with *lhasa* and a live bait (normally an insect) is tied at the centre of the dome. This trap is placed on rocks, between streams or other habitats. When the bird tries to take the bait, it gets stuck to the arms of the structure.

A method for catching gregarious species such as the blue magpie, whitecrested laughing thrush is to form a large circle of *lhasa* coated twigs of about one and half feet on the ground. Decoy birds such as a whitecrested laughing thrush and an owlet are tied in the middle of the circle and then teased to attract other passing birds. When thrushes or magpies come to mob the owl they get stuck to the rods. Birds can also be caught using territorial decoy birds to attract other territorial species or by using smaller birds as bait. For the latter normally small warblers are used. After

plucking feathers, they are strung up so that they resemble a tasty bait for species such as the blue and green magpie.

As most of these birds are caught by *lhasa* method, the feathers are cleaned using kerosene oil and finally the oil is removed with cowdung ash which soaks the oil. This needs very careful handling and as most softbills are fragile, the cleaning is a skillful task.

Trappers have various methods for feeding the birds they catch. Insectivorous birds are fed on a diet of termites for the first few days. Termites are slowly replaced with minced meat nicely mixed with gram flour. The composition of this mixture tends towards minced meat in the first few days and is slowly changed by adding more gram flour so that the birds are accustomed to a prepared easily available vegetarian diet. Frugivorous birds are somewhat more hardy and along with nectarivorous species like chloropsis and spiderhunters form a group that is not primarily dependent on insect food. However, these birds do take the occasional insect in varying degrees depending on the species, unlike predominantly insectivorous birds which have almost no fruit or nectar in their diet.

Among softbills, one of the most wanted birds is the hunting cissas or the green magpie (*Cissa formosae*). This species was seen to change colour in captivity from a green colour to a blue. This is variously attributed to melanism and to direct exposure to sunlight by the traders although no scientific verification has been done for this phenomenon. They are either fed minced meat or small birds such as warblers. Another group of birds in the trade are the sunbirds of which the yellow-backed (*Aethopyga nipalensis*) and the purple sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*) are the most preferred. They are fed with a mixture of honey and sugar. Sometimes raw sugar is given to sunbirds and spiderhunters which the birds eat thinking it to be spider's egg.

Among bulbuls the white-cheeked (*Pycnonotus leucogenys leucogenys*) brown-eared (*Hypsipetes flavalus*) present in this area are caught by the owl trick. Bulbuls are favoured birds among softbills, because of their easy diet and low prices. They are considered to be the hardest among softbills. Species like rufousbellied niltava

(*Muscicapa sundara*) and the white-capped redstart (*Chaimorromis leucocephalus*) are also caught for their colour and are kept only by specialist aviculturists, because of their specific diet. The grey tit (*Parus major*), the greenbacked tit (*Parus monticolus*), the yellowcheeked tit (*Parus xanthogenys*) and the redheaded tit (*Aegithalos cocinnus*) are caught for their agile behaviour. Though they have a difficult diet in captivity they were exported in large numbers before the ban on the trade. They were quite commonly seen in Chalthi. The other softbill species seen or caught include chestnutbellied nuthatch (*Sitta castanea*), blackcapped sibia (*Heterophasia capistrata*), maroon oriole (*Oriolus traillii*) slatyheaded scimitar babbler (*Pomatorhinus horsfieldi*), barthroated siva (*Minla strigula*), redbilled leothrix or Pekin robin (*Leiothrix lutea*), silver-eared mesia (*Leiothrix argentauris*), blue-winged siva (*Minla cyanouroptera*), plumbeous redstart (*Rhyacomis fuliginosus*), blue whistling thrush (*Myiophonus caeruleus*), verditer flycatcher (*Muscicapa thalassina*), and white eye (*Zosterops palpebrosa*).

This was one of my most memorable field trips. I surely disagree with trapping for trade related purpose, which has now fortunately decreased to a very large extent after the ban. But certainly the trappers can be used for conservation purposes. They can be very valuable birdguides as they are so well aware of the areas and habitats of many species. Their techniques can be used for bird photography by following their owl trick for shy and less known birds. These trappers have their own sub-cultures which is not fully documented or researched which will be lost in one or two generations due to the ban on their trade. There should be some way to rehabilitate them and use them in a constructive way for better harmony between man and animals.

Acknowledgement

I am thankful to my supervisor Dr. Asad R Rahmani, Chairman of Centre for Wildlife and Ornithology, AMU for his useful suggestion for this article and constant support for my work.



Birdwatching in the South Andamans

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As a part of the M.S. Ecology course-work at the Salim Ali School of Ecology, Pondicherry University, we undertook a field-trip to the South Andamans. Our nine days' stay on the Island gave me an opportunity to get an idea of the birdlife of these islands and see a few endemic species. Though we were mostly based at Port Blair, I returned with a checklist of over 80 species, about a third of the species recorded on these islands.

We had sailed from Madras on 8th March 1988 by the Najd II but the departure was delayed by more than eight

hours due to some minor repair works. The next two days, we were out in the sea and we spent our time trying to locate some seabirds. We saw none except a flock of some 36 tern-like birds, dark in colour (noddy terns?). Apart from this, there were several flying fish, gliding low over the water just above the surface.

On 11th morning we reached Port Blair. Contrary to our expectations, the scenery was most certainly not impressive. We could see several coconut trees and hillsides covered with buildings. It took almost two hours to

land and all this time we were out on the deck watching birds. There were several whitebellied swiftlets flying about, low overhead. A couple of blacknaped terns sailed leisurely past. Three common swallows landed on a wire on the ship and a pair of house sparrows came aboard investigating for scraps of food. On the docks, we sighted a common myna and an immature whitebellied sea eagle flew overhead.

We were put up at the Youth Hostel in the town from where we were picked up after lunch by a van and driven to Chidiya Tapoo. This is the southern end of the South Andaman Island and is about 30 km. to the south of Port Blair. The journey took us through the countryside which was mostly occupied by settlers.

There was no natural forest left in the area and there were fields and gardens all along. It was only some three kilometres ahead of Chidiya Tapoo that we came across some remnant forest patches and even these appeared to be highly disturbed.

Chidiya Tapoo is a small hamlet where people come for picnics in the weekends. The forest Department has a rest house with two air-conditioned suites, a large dormitory and a hall besides a Verandah overlooking the bay and Rutland island beyond. The forest around Chidiya Tapoo is heavily disturbed. There are still some remnant mangrove forest with *Rhizophora* and *Sonneratia*. The mangrove patches are alternated by stretches of rocky/gravelly beach and during the low tide, a large stretch of sand and mud flats are exposed. The sea is rather shallow and is an excellent place to observe corals and other underwater life. The littoral and moist deciduous forest types can be seen in the vicinity of the Bungalow. In the littoral forest, there were trees such as *Mimusops littoralis*, *Thespesia populnea*, *Hibiscus tiliaceus*, *Erythrina indica* and *Pongamia glabra*. *Pandanus* clumps were seen in several places. The disturbed patch of moist deciduous forest averaged about 70 ft (22 m) in height and with trees reaching about 100 ft (30 m.). Some of the trees identified include *Terminalia bialata*, *Pterocarpus dalbergioides*, *Dipterocarpus* sp., *Sterculia alata* and *Ficus* spp. Lianas and epiphytic orchids were common. Bamboos and palms were also occasionally seen. The shrub layer was, in several patches, dominated by *Eupatorium*. Around the guest house and the hamlet, there were introduced species such as Tamarind, *Gliricidia*, *Cassia fistula*, Casuarina, coconut and areca nut.

We stayed at Chidiya Tapoo till the evening of 16th March and left for Port Blair. We also visited Mt. Harriett, a national park, on the outskirts of Port Blair which has some good patches of natural forest and Kada Kachan, a patch of mangrove forest, from where logs are transported to the saw mills in rafts.

On 20th we sailed back to Madras by the same vessel. Again we spent most time on the deck looking out for

seabirds. On 21st a white tern-like bird was seen in flight and four brownish birds with white primaries and abdomen were noticed landing over the water. They appeared to be skuas. The next day, I noticed one more bird in flight and though I am not very certain, the bird could have been an Arctic skua.

It was surprising that despite the severe habitat destruction in the Andamans, I was able to see over fifty forest bird species in such a brief visit including seven endemics. This does not, however, show that the birds are capable of withstanding extensive forest and habitat loss. Perhaps these changes would be reflected in the bird populations gradually over the next few years. It is time the concerned authorities take steps to monitor the biodiversity of these islands and birds in particular, to identify sensitive species that would require intensive conservation measures.

LIST OF BIRDS SEEN AT THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS - 11-19 March, 1988

- Red turtle dove (*Streptopelia tranquebarica*) - Perhaps the commonest dove around. Seen at Port Blair, the countryside between Port Blair and Chidiya Tapoo and at Mt. Harriett. A congregation of some twenty birds seen in a barren field, once, Heard calls and male seen displaying, bowing head etc. One bird near the Rest House at Chidiya Tapoo, seen collecting nest materials on 16th. Later its nest was located some 40 ft up on *Mimusops* tree, close to the mangroves. Male seen bringing nest materials to the nest. Nest inside thick foliage and hardly visible from outside.
- Emerald dove (*Chalcophaps indica*) - Not uncommon at Chidiya Tapoo. One or two birds regularly seen on transects, either on the path or under the shrubs next to the path. One bird clearly seen was more rufous-tinged with less distinct white over the eyes.
- Lorikeet (*Loriculus vernalis*) - Quite common at Chidiya Tapoo and seen on both the mangrove and forest trees. Usually 4-5 birds seen together. A couple of birds appeared to be prospecting for nest-holes.
- Whitecollard kingfisher (*Halcyon chloris*) - Commonest kingfisher at Chidiya Tapoo. Also seen on the outskirts of Port Blair. Fairly tame and confiding, allowing close approach. Usually seen in the mangroves but on several occasions well away from water in forested parts. Noisy. Usually in pairs or in trios, rarely singly.
- Mangrove whistler (*Pachycephala pectoralis*) - At least a pair of birds at the *Rhizophora* stand at Chidiya Tapoo, one more heard nearby and a fourth bird heard at the jetty at Mt. Harriett. A nest under construction at Chidiya Tapoo on a *Rhizophora conjugata* bush, eight feet above the ground. The bush was within the high tide mark. Nest was hammock-like, cup-shaped, made up of fibres collected from a nearby fallen tree. The nest was a flimsy structure with sparse lining. Nest under observation from 13th to 16th. No eggs seen till we left. The birds appeared to visit the nest irregularly. At least three distinct types of calls heard. These were similar to the whistling notes of the common iora (*Aegithina tiphia*), a species not found in the Andamans. One of these sounded like "swhee- ee-ee-" and ended with an abrupt "quiet". Another call was "ee-ee-ee-ee-ee- view-view" (the last notes were uttered fast). Yet another went on "wick-wick-wick-wick- - - uuvvvee".

For lack of space, only a few birds listed are included -
Editor.



Birds of Nauni Campus of University of Horticulture and Forestry, Solan, Himachal Pradesh

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ARUN PRATAP SINGH, Coniferous Research Centre, Shimla (H.P.)

Introduction

In the recent past, a large percentage of forested area in the mid-hills of Himachal Pradesh has been converted into agricultural fields and orchards. The practice has changed the ecology of these hills thereby affecting the fauna of these areas. Some of the purely forested species of birds have disappeared and their place has been taken over by species of the open forest. Nauni campus of University of Horticulture and Forestry, Solan, located in the mid-hills of Himachal Pradesh is one of such areas. It is located 30° 52' N and 77° 11' E at an altitude of 1250 m above sea level. The campus is spread over an area of 550 ha. The area has mild climatic conditions with average annual minimum and maximum temperature ranging between 12-25°C and average annual rainfall around 90 cm. Thus the area essentially has subtropical to subtemperate climate and supports a variety of flora and fauna. At the campus most of the area is under agroforestry ecosystem where land is being used for the production of vegetables, fruits and some other field crops. These fields are surrounded by tree species like *Toona ciliata*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Grevia optiva*, *Bauhinia variegata*, *Celtis australis*, *Quercus leucotrichophora*, *Pinus roxburghii*, *Pyrus pashia*, etc. The wasteland area of the campus is covered with shrubs like *Lantana camara*, *Berberis* sp. *Woodfordia floribunda*, *Debregeasia hypoleuca*, *Coriaria nepalensis* and wild pomegranate. Large area of wasteland is under grass cover. Panther, barking deer, civets, yellowthroated marten, jackals, hare, porcupine, monkeys, langurs and mongoose are the prominent mammals found in the university campus.

Survey of avifauna of the campus has been carried out since 1992 by the first author with the second author joining him on many occasions.

Under a Govt. of India project 'Energy Plantations' financed by the Ministry of Energy, Govt. of India, nearly 200 ha of wasteland in the campus has been brought under tree cover during the last five years. The tree species including some exotic species planted under the project are *Pinus roxburghii*, *Acacia mollissima*, *Bauhinia variegata*, *Grevia optiva*, *Celtis australis*, *Acrocarpus fraxinifolius*, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, *Leucaena leucocephala*, *Ulmus laevigata*, *Morus alba*, *Quercus leucotrichophora*, etc. some species of indigenous shrubs like *Indigofera* sp., *Woodfordia floribunda*, *Coriaria nepalensis* etc. have also been planted. Thus in the near future there will be lot of vegetation cover at the campus which will improve the ecological conditions of the campus and would serve as an ideal habitat for birds and other wild animals. However the present status of the avifauna under the existing ecological conditions is listed here.

The birds were observed and identified with the help of field binoculars (7 x 50) and also from their calls. Following books were consulted for the identification of birds : Ali & Ripley's Compact Edition (1983) and Woodcock (1980).

Abbreviations used

Status	R	Resident
	SM	Summer migrant
	WM	Winter migrant
	V	Vagrant
	B	Breeds in the Campus
Distribution	C	Common
	FC	Fairly Common
	NTC	Not too common
	OR	One record

Family : Accipitridae

Hb.Sr.No.

124	Blackwinged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	R,B,NTC
133	Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	R,NTC
138	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	R,B,NTC
144	Crested goshawk	<i>Accipiter trivirgatus</i>	OR
	The bird was found preying on a black partridge		
157	White-eyed buzzard-eagle	<i>Butastur teesa</i>	V
178	Black or king vulture	<i>Torgos calvus</i>	R,NTC
181	Himalayan griffon vulture	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>	R,C
185	Whitebacked vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	R,FC
186	Scavenger vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	V
196	Crested serpent eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>	SM,FC

Family : Falconidae

222	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	R,FC
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Family : Phasianidae

238	Black partridge	<i>Francolinus francolinus</i>	R,B,C
255	Jungle bush quail	<i>Perdica asiatica</i>	R,B,FC
293	Whitecrested kaleej pheasant	<i>Lophura leucomelana</i>	R,B,FC
299	Red junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	R,B,FC

Family : Charadriidae

366	Redwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	R,B,NTC
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Family : Columbidae

516	Blue rock pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	R,B,C
534	Ring dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	SM,B,FC
537	Spotted dove	<i>Spreptopelia chinensis</i>	SM,B,FC
541	Little brown dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	V
542	Emerald dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	SM,NTC

Family : Psittacidae

545	Large indian parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>	R,C
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- 557 Blossomheaded parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala* R,FC
 562 Slatyheaded parakeet *Psittacula himalayana* WM,C

Family : Cuculidae

- 570 Pied crested cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* SM,NTC
 573 Common hawk-cuckoo *Cuculus varius* SM,FC
 578 Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* SM,FC
 580 Himalayan cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus* SM,NTC
 590 Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* SM,NTC
 596 Sirkeer cuckoo *Taccocua leschenaultii* V

Family : Strigidae

- 616 Scops owl *Otus stops* OR
 The bird was caught from a room in the faculty building in the morning hours. It was released after identification. Bird flew away without any discomfort.
 636 Barred jungle owlet *Glaucidium radiatum* R,B,FC

Family : Apodidae

- 703 House swift *Apus affinis* R,B,C

Family : Alcedinidae

- 717 Pied kingfisher *Ceryle lugubris* R,NTC
 722 Small blue kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* R,NTC
 735 Whitebreasted kingfisher *Halcyon smymensis* R,FC

Family : Meropidae

- 750 Small green bee-eater *Merops orientalis* SM,NTC

Family : Coraciidae

- 755 Blue jay *Coracias benghalensis* V

Family : Upupidae

- 763 Hoopoe *Upupa epops* SM,C

Family : Capitonidae

- 777 Himalayan great barbet *Megalaima virens* R,B,C
 788 Bluethroated barbet *Megalaima asiatica* R,FC

Family : Picidae

- 798 Speckled piculet *Picumnus innominatus* SM,NTC
 807 Scalybellied green woodpecker *Picus squamatus* R,NTC
 809 Blacknaped green woodpecker *Picus canus* R,NTC
 814 Himalayan small yellow naped woodpecker *Picus chlorolophus* SM,OR
 842 Brownfronted pied woodpecker *Picoides auriceps* R,FC
 848 Greycrowned pygmy woodpecker *Picoides canicapillus* V

Family : Hirundinidae

- 921 Wiretailed swallow *Hirundo smithii* SM,B,C
 924 Redrumped swallow *Hirundo daurica* SM,B,C

Family : Laniidae

- 946 Rufousbacked shrike *Lanius schach* R,FC

Family : Oriolidae

- 953 Golden oriole *Oriolus oriolus* SM,NTC

Family : Dicruridae

- 962 Black drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* SM,B,FC
 965 Ashy drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* SM,NTC

Family : Sturnidae

- 984 Spottedwinged stare *Saroglossa spiloptera* SM,NTC
 987 Greyheaded myna *Sturnus malabaricus* SM,B,FC
 994 Brahminy myna *Sturnus pagodarum* SM,NTC
 1006 Common myna *Acridotheres tristis* R,B,C
 1009 Jungle myna *Acridotheres fuscus* SM,B,NTC

Family : Corvidae

- 1022 Blackthroated jay *Garrulus lanceolatus* R,NTC
 1025 Yellowbilled blue magpie *Cissa flavirostris* V
 1027 Redbilled blue magpie *Cissa erythrorhyncha* R,B,C
 1030a Indian tree pie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* R,FC
 1037 Himalayan tree pie *Dendrocitta formosae* R,FC
 1049 House crow *Corvus splendens* SM,NTC
 1054 Jungle crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* R,B,C

Family : Campephagidae

- 1069 Wood shrike *Tephrodomis pondicerianus* R, NTC
 1078 Blackheaded cuckoo-shrike *Coracina melanoptera* SM,FC
 1085 Longtailed minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus* SM,FC

Family : Irenidae

- 1097 Iora *Aegithina tiphia* V

Family : Pycnonotidae

- 1125 Whitecheeked bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys* R,B,C
 1126 Redvented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* R,B,FC
 1148 Black bulbul *Hypsipetes madagascariensis* WM,C

Family : Muscicapidae

- 1168 Slatyheaded scimitar babbler *Pomatorhinus schisticeps* WM,FC
 1182 Rustycheeked scimitar babbler *Pomatorhinus erythrogenus* R,B, FC
 1211 Blackchinned babbler *Stachyris pyrrhops* R,FC
 1230 Yellow-eyed babbler *Chrysomma sinense* SM,NTC
 1254 Common babbler *Turdoides caudatus* R,B,C
 1261 Jungle babbler *Turdoides striatus* R,B,C
 1292,
 1293 Rufouschinned laughing thrush *Garrulax rufogularis* WT,NTC
 1314 Streaked laughing thrush *Garrulax lineatus* R,B,C
 1333 Silvereared mesia *Leiothrix argentauris* WM,NTC
 1335 Redbilled leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea* R,FC
 1341 Redwinged shrike-babbler *Pteruthius flaviscapis* WM,NTC
 1396 Blackcapped sibia *Heterophasia capistrata* WM,FC
 1411 Redbreasted flycatcher *Muscicapa parva* WM,FC
 1421 Whitebrowed blue flycatcher *Muscicapa supercilialis* WM,NTC

1423 Slaty blue flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa leucomelanura</i>	WM,FC
1445 Verditer flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa thalassina</i>	SM,FC
1448 Greyheaded flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>	WM,FC
1450 Yellowbellied fantail flycatcher	<i>Rhipidura hypoxantha</i>	WM,NTC
1454 Whitethroated fantail flycatcher	<i>Rhipidura albicollis</i>	R,C
1460 Paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	SM,FC
1503 Franklin's longtail warbler	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>	NTC
1527 Himalayan brown hill warbler	<i>Prinia criniger</i>	R,C
1535 Tailor bird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	R,FC
1575 Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	WM,FC
1579 Tickell's leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus affinis</i>	WM,FC
1587 Orangebarred leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus pulcher</i>	WM,FC
1594 Pallas's leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus proregulus</i>	WM,FC
1616 Greyheaded flycatcher-warbler	<i>Seicercus xanthoschistos</i>	WM,FC
1644 Bluethroat	<i>Erithacus svecicus</i>	WM,NTC
1647 Himalayan rubythroat	<i>Erithacus pectoralis</i>	WM,NTC
1654 Redflanked bush robin	<i>Erithacus cyanurus</i>	WM,NTC
1657 Golden bush robin	<i>Erithacus chrysaeus</i>	WM,NTC
1661 Magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	R,FC
1670 Blueheaded redstart	<i>Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus</i>	WM,NTC
1671 Black redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	WM,NTC
1675 Bluefronted redstart	<i>Phoenicurus frontalis</i>	WM,NTC
1679 Plumbeous redstart	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosus</i>	WM,FC
1688 Spotted forktail	<i>Enicurus maculatus</i>	R,NTC
1700 Pied bush chat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>	SM,B,C
1705 Dark-grey bush chat	<i>Saxicola ferrea</i>	R,NTC
1716 Whitecapped redstart	<i>Chalmarornis leucocephalus</i>	WM,FC
1724 Chestnutbellied rock thrush	<i>Monticola rufiventris</i>	WM,NTC
1729 Himalayan whistling thrush	<i>Myiophoneus caeruleus</i>	R,C
1738 Plainbacked mountain thrush	<i>Zoothera mollissima</i>	WM,NTC
1750 Greywinged blackbird	<i>Turdus boulboul</i>	WM,NTC
1763 Blackthroated thrush	<i>Turdus ruficollis</i>	WM,C

Family : Cinclidae

1775 Brown dipper	<i>Cinclus pallasi</i>	WM,NTC
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Family : Purnellidae

1786 Blackthroated accentor	<i>Prunella atrogularis</i>	WM,FC
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Family : Paridae

1792 Grey tit	<i>Parus major</i>	R,B,C
1802 Crested black tit	<i>Parus melanolophus</i>	WM,NTC
1809 Yellowcheeked tit	<i>Parus xanthogenys</i>	WM,FC
1818 Redheaded tit	<i>Aegithalos concinnus</i>	WM,NTC

Family : Sittidae

1839 Wall creeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>	WM,NTC
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Family : Certhiidae

1847 Himalayan tree creeper	<i>Certhia himalayana</i>	WM,FC
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Family : Motacillidae

1854 Tree pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	WM,FC
1884 Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla caspica</i>	WM,FC
1885 Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	WM,FC

Family : Dicaeidae

1905 Firebreasted flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum ignipectus</i>	WM,FC
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Family : Nectariniidae

1917 Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	SM,B,C
1919 Mrs Gould's sunbird	<i>Aethopyga gouldiae</i>	SM,FC
1922 Yellowbacked sunbird	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>	R,FC

Family : Zosteropidae

1933 White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>	R,B,C
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Family : Ploceidae

1938 House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	R,B,C
1946 Cinnamon tree sparrow	<i>Passer rutilans</i>	WM,C
1966 Whitethroated munia	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>	V
1974 Spotted munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	R,B,C

Family : Fringillidae

1989 Greyheaded goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	WM,FC
1990 Himalayan greenfinch	<i>Carduelis spinoides</i>	WM,C
1998 Goldfronted finch	<i>Serinus pusillus</i>	WM,NTC
2011 Indian rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	WM,FC

Family : Emberizidae

2048 Whitecapped bunting	<i>Emberiza stewarti</i>	WM,C
2052 Rock bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	WM,C
2055 Greyheaded bunting	<i>Emberiza fucata</i>	WM,FC
2060 Crested bunting	<i>Melophus lathamii</i>	SM,B,FC

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the Head, Department of Silviculture and Agroforestry of this University for permission and facilities provided for undertaking this study.

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Short Notes

MADHAVARAM JHEEL — DEVELOPMENTAL PLANS.

PRESTON AHIMAZ, World Wide Fund for Nature-India, Tamil Nadu State Office, 13, First Floor, 11th Street, Nandanam Extension, Madras 600 035

The Madhavaram Jheel at Madhavaram milk colony, in north Madras has been the subject of long scrutiny by the World Wide Fund for Nature—India (WWF-I). Tamil Nadu State Office (TNSO) and Madras Naturalists Society (MNS). Thanks largely to the almost single-handed efforts of Mr V Guruswamy who has been monitoring the birds of the jheel for the past 7 years. It has been soundly established that the jheel is possibly the largest breeding ground of the pheasant-tailed jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* with nearly 300 birds attempting to nest here.

For a long time the jheel has also been subjected to such disturbances as cattle and pig wallowing, snail-collection by locals, and hunting of birds, but has managed to pull along with no significant long-term effects on the birds, especially the jacanas.

Now a new development has arisen. Recently the jheel was taken over by the Veterinary Department as it lies within their property, and is being converted into an aquaculture project for rearing fish. Freshwater prawns may soon follow.

The Veterinary Department has already begun deepening the now-dry bed of the jheel to a depth of 2 metres, an operation which has opened up the underlying water table. The department, using power shovels and damper trucks, plans to complete the deepening operation before the monsoons this year. There are plans to leave 2 islands of 15 acres in the centre of the 30-40 acre jheel, which former will be dry (due to their proposed elevated position) throughout the year. Spotted deer, procured from the Forest Department, are proposed to be introduced onto the islands which are to be planted with trees and which will also have a research lab built upon one of them. The entire water spread area is to be cordoned off with a chain-link fence and local fisher-folk and others are to be excluded from the place.

Several varieties of freshwater carp are to be introduced into the jheel after it is ready. Fry about 4 cm in length are to be released here and harvested when grown. There is to be no after care of the fry which will be expected to manage on their own.

Dangers

In view of the ecological importance of the jheel as it is the largest breeding ground for the pheasant-tailed jacana in the region, the proposed plan poses several threats to it :

- 1 The deepening of the jheels will impart a perennial water holding capacity to the jheel. This may or may not be in the best interest of the jheel's ecology, which will have by now evolved a well-settled and organised pattern of wet-and-dry existence. Upsetting this pattern might be beneficial to some organisms, like frogs, but

may not be quite so beneficial to others. This needs to be looked into.

- 2 The jheel is being deepened to a depth of 2 metres with a power shovel (Poclain) which gouges out great quantities of earth from the jheel-bed, leaving a vertical 2-metre, sheer drop at the edge. This kind of a situation is hazardous to animals and man and more importantly, completely eliminates one important habitat for wading birds and other shallow-water organisms — a sloping bank. Waders of different sizes prefer waters of varying depths — a situation that only a gradually sloping bank caters to. A sheer edge will therefore drive all the wading birds away, including scores of other shallow-water organisms.
- 3 The rearing of fish will require clearing of floating vegetation on which the pheasant-tailed jacanas and a few other birds nest. Clearing of this vegetation would therefore mean eliminating the nesting site of these birds.
- 4 The creation of the two islands in the middle would reduce the water spread by 15 acres — the proposed dry area of the islands. This alone may not be very problematic, but introducing deer onto these islands would mean reducing them to a barren landscape as deer can be as devastating on vegetation as goats. Further, the construction of a laboratory on these islands would mean a constant presence of people on them in addition to the disturbance caused by to-and-fro boat traffic. This would scare off the bird life and reduce their populations at the jheel.
- 5 If the fish harvesting period coincides with the breeding season of the birds, the situation would be highly damaging to the latter. Nests would accidentally (or intentionally) be destroyed, young birds would be frightened out of their nests too early and brooding parents would abandon nests or chicks.

Recommendations

Although the chain-link fencing would keep out cattle and pigs thus eliminating the wallowing problem and would reduce human disturbance in the form of snail-collection and poaching, the dangers that the project poses far outweighs this benefit. If the current plans are followed. However, if good sense prevails, the situation could be transformed into a successful commensalistic programme where both man and nature can survive and even thrive side by side, each party deriving benefit from and providing benefit to, the other. The following recommendations may be considered and implemented for such a situation :

- 1 The peripheral edge of the bed must be slanted down at about 30° degrees approximately, as against the present 90° drop, to retain the important shore habitat.
- 2 The islands, if at all they are to be constructed, should on no account be built up or used by people — they should be left wild and unaltered except for the initial

planting of trees and shrubs, to be used as a core area by the birds and other wildlife.

Deer must, at all costs, be kept away from the islands. If at all they are required, they may be housed in a fenced-in area on the bank near the guest house. The ideal situation would be not to go in for deer at all, as maintaining these animals can turn out to be a herculean task with no useful returns.

- 3 Floating vegetation near the centre of the lake, or around the islands (if there are to be islands) or near secluded, safe and undisturbed peripheral edges of the waterspread should be left intact for the respective birds to nest upon.
- 4 Fish harvesting should be conducted in a manner which would cause least disturbance to the birds, especially if the harvest coincides with the nesting season. Areas with floating vegetation set aside for resting and shelter should be banned from fishing activity — fishing boats should not enter these areas.

Conclusion

While there is every reason to promote human resource development projects wherever possible, this should never be done at the cost of the health of the ecology of the area which in many cases (as also in the present one) is essential for the success and continued survival of the project. Dialogues on the subject would be welcomed as such dialogues would definitely lead to a successful project and a healthy living environment for all to benefit from.



GREY HEADED FLYCATCHERS AND LARGE CROWNED LEAF WARBLERS. J. PRAVEEN, 14/779(2), Ambadi, K. Medu P.O., Palakkad 678 013

From 30th December 1994 to 3rd January 1995, I found myself participating in the bird survey at Silent Valley National park (Palakkad district, Kerala) conducted by Nature Educational Society, Thrissur (NEST) and Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI, Peechi) as a part of their biodiversity programme. I was stationed at Sairandhri along with Dr KG Raghu and four others from Madras Naturalists Society (MNS). The primary vegetation adjoining our camp was typical evergreen jungles with narrow strips of grasslands in the steeper portions of the hills.

Of the numerous interesting birds recorded, the diminutive, gay- coloured yet lively grey-headed flycatchers (*Culicapa ceylonensis*) were my favourites. They were observed four times during the survey period but remarkably atleast one large-crowned leaf warbler (*Phylloscopus occipitalis*) accompanied them each time. Although some other avians like yellow-cheeked tits and velvet-fronted nuthatches were found in some of the mixed hunting troops, the consistency of the former partners was conspicuous.

While watching such an association with Dr KG Raghu on 2.01.1995, we could vividly sense a strange behaviour in the case of the six large-crowned leaf warblers assembled.

Most of them were actively foraging on the medium sized trees in a typical nuthatch fashion. Creeping down the side branches, they preyed on small insects which they found on the barks. Even though, the imitation activity was not of the same quality as that of the nuthatches (never hopping up), it was a treat to watch a host of leaf warblers indulging in this queer behaviour. Sadly, we could not spend much time at the scene as we were on our two-hour transect period.

At Neelikkal, an adjoining area having identical habitat, Pramod P and Manoj V Nair (my fellow participants) noted the same behaviour patterns with slight variations (pers. comm.). They pointed that the grey-headed flycatchers and large-crowned leaf warblers were very regular members of mixed hunting flocks but never were these aves seen without the accompaniment of other birds. Also, their foraging levels were distinct, leaf warblers frequenting the foliage canopy while flycatchers keeping a much lower strata of vegetation.

They also found the large-crowned leaf warblers exhibiting nuthatch fashion at heights of about 40 m, but always on the main trunks of *Cullenia exarillata* trees and not on the side branches. The trunks were covered with a profuse growth of epiphytes which might have aided the birds in getting a good hold. The birds were only noted to cling and not even once were they seen to hop or creep downwards as in nuthatches. They did not see the birds capturing insects and hence the purpose of this unusual perching was not clear then. Anyway such a pattern of foraging was unrecorded in the case of leaf warblers and hence the note.

Acknowledgements

I thank Mr Manoj. V. Nair and Mr Pramod, P. for sharing their field notes and commenting on the subject and Dr KG Raghu for the immense field assistance he had provided.



USE OF OLD BARBET HOLE, SUCCESSIVE BROODS AND MIMICRY BY MAGPIE ROBIN. MOSADDIQUE UMAR, C/o Mr Justice S Haque, B.T. College Lane, West Lachit Nagar, Gauhati 781 707

In the mid eighties, I lived in a house on the shoulder of a well forested hill in the Kharghuli area of Gauhati. It was about 50 feet above the road level and offered a grandstand view of the river Brahmaputra. Although it looked like a haunted place, it was good for birdwatching for the many trees there would attract birds throughout the year. At the northern edge of the compound, from where the ground steeply fell away, there was a row of wild neem trees. The branches of some of them had a number of holes which I could not explain. One day, while climbing the stairs to my house, I saw a blue throated barbet vigorously biting a horizontal neem branch which was absolutely green (not decayed or semi-decayed), and taking out chunks of wood. The mystery of the old holes was immediately solved. Besides, I further learned that the barbet did not reuse old nesting holes.

One night, a thunder storm brought down one of the neem branches with an old barbet hole. By miracle of miracles, the branch landed exactly at the same angle at which it had been borne by the parent tree. Smaller branches had not only cushioned the fall but also had propped it about 2 feet above the ground. It was just 6 feet away from the window of our dressing room.

In the morning, my wife told me that she had seen a bird, which later turned out to be a magpie robin, enter the hole in the branch and come out a few seconds later and that on approaching it, she had found two hatchlings in it. When I returned from office in the evening, she sadly told me that although the bird had returned to feed several times during the day, it could not enter the nest for fear of a herd of goats which had started feasting on the neem leaves. The following day, the robin abandoned the nest and the infants perished. A kind of long red carnivorous ants with centipede like legs soon polished them off.

Some days later, my wife smilingly led me to the fallen branch and asked me to peer into the hole. What a sight! A clutch of five azure eggs! A record perhaps. A few days later she told me that all five eggs had hatched. Good news indeed. The first thing I did was to ask her not to go near the nest and that if her motherly instincts got the better of her discretion, then see the kids only immediately after their mother had fed them and gone for another forage. I warned her that once the robin found out that her nest had been discovered, she might abandon her chicks once again. As I myself had caused some abandonments through over curiosity in the past, I felt that people without scientific credentials like me should not visit a bird nest too frequently.

Three to four days later, I went to have look at the hatchlings. The moment I peered into the hole they raised their heads and opened their huge mouths towards me. They were completely blind and I had not made the slightest noise. Then? Probably, the change in the lighting conditions in the hole caused by my shadow had alerted them of their mother's arrival.

Some weeks later, I was changing in the dressing room after returning from the Idd prayers when something came through the open window, hit my belly, and dropped on the floor. It was a robin fledgling. Thinking that it had become a bit too adventurous for its age, I gently put it back into the nest hole. Hardly had I withdrawn my hand when two young robins flushed out of the hole and "shakily" flew downhill which was ideal as it had the advantage of a hang gliding take off point. Before I could recover from my surprise, the other three fledglings flushed and went in the same direction. What an auspicious day! As some crows were already hot on their tails, we raised an alarm. People lower down picked it up and scared the crows off. A couple of days later, I saw three of the dull coloured young robins perching on the parent neem tree. They were on their own now. But I

had a mixed feeling as I did not know the fate of the other two. Perhaps, the law of the jungle had taken its own course.

Late one afternoon, I heard a black drongo and a spotted dove calling alternately almost from the same spot on the neem tree. As these birds are not known to be the best of friends, I went out to find out what had brought them so close together. Lo and behold! A magpie robin was doing both a black drongo or chloropsis and spotted dove. I had no way of knowing whether he was doing it for fun or trying to fool some one. But foxed I was. Incidentally, I am not yet sure whether drongo mimics leaf bird or vice versa.

However, some questions remained un-answered :-

1. Does magpie robin always raise more than one batch of young in a single season (May - August)?
2. Why, despite losing the first brood, did the robin chose the same hole in the fallen branch to raise the second when several other old barbet holes were available high upon trees?
3. Did she somehow know that on the second occasion she would lay a clutch of five eggs and need a more roomy nest which she could not have elsewhere?
4. Was that the reason why she rechose the hole in the fallen branch despite the hazard of nesting just above the ground level.

Whatever the reason, we had done our part by not allowing any one near the branch or take it away for using as firewood.

This incident took place during May-August, 1987.



SCOOTY TERN RECORD FROM THATTAKKADU IN THE WESTERN GHATS. DR. R. SUGATHAN, K.C. JACOB and ABY. P. VARGHESE, Thattakkadu Bird Sanctuary, Njeyappilly, Kerala 686 691

The only published record of the sooty tern *Sterna fuscata nubilosa* from Kerala is from Ramanattukara (Calicut University Campus) by D.N. Mathew and E.A.A. Shukkur during 1973. (JBNHS 71 : 144-45). The campus is situated 12 Kms inland of the sea coast and it was reported as a vagrant.

Handbook Vol. 3:62, records this species breeding in large numbers in Laccadives islands (Cherbaniani reef); they are also recorded breeding on Vengurla rocks of the Western Coast. During the rainy season this species along with noddy terns (*Anous stolidus*) were recorded a few times from Point Calimere Wild Life Sanctuary of Tamil Nadu by the 1st author during BNHS Bird migration study projects (1980-86).

However during July 1994 one specimen of sooty tern was collected from a paddy field close to the Thattakkadu Bird Sanctuary in Kerala. Thattakkadu Bird Sanctuary is a

Tropical Bird community Sanctuary bordered by the River Periyar and its tributary Pooyamkutty on two sides. On the other two sides there is a forest. The distance from Cochin sea coast along the road is nearly 75 Kms. When the bird was sighted by us it was very weak and was unable to fly. It was brought to our office in the sanctuary and identified as an adult sooty tern from the following diagnoses.

The bird was slightly smaller than a house crow with 4 cms in length. Plumage was sooty black above with a prominent white frontal band. The upper portion (Superciliary) extended just above the eyes. The black cap extended through the eyes to the base of the bill. The whitish breast and throat slowly transformed to greyish as it reached the abdomen.

The wings were long and pointed. Tail deeply forked. Leading edge of the upperwing whitish. Tail greyish white with end feathers elongated forming a 'V'. Bill and feet black.

Other Measurements are as follows :-

Wing	-	281 mm
Bill	-	37 mm (FF)
Tarsus	-	23 mm
Tail	-	152 mm (outer)

No moult was noticed, Broodpatch was absent, stomach was empty. Primaries and tail feathers fresh with very little tear and wear.

On catching the bird it was repeatedly pecking our hand. It made no effort to escape showing that it was very weak.

However it could live only for few hours. Later it was skinned and the specimen given to the Regional Museum of Mysore for display. On examining its body cavity it was noticed that the bird was a male with normal testis.

This record may be the first of its kind from the foot hills of the Western Ghats and so far away from the sea shore. It is possible that the bird drifted through the Periyar river upstream by strong upwind from the sea and lost its orientation.

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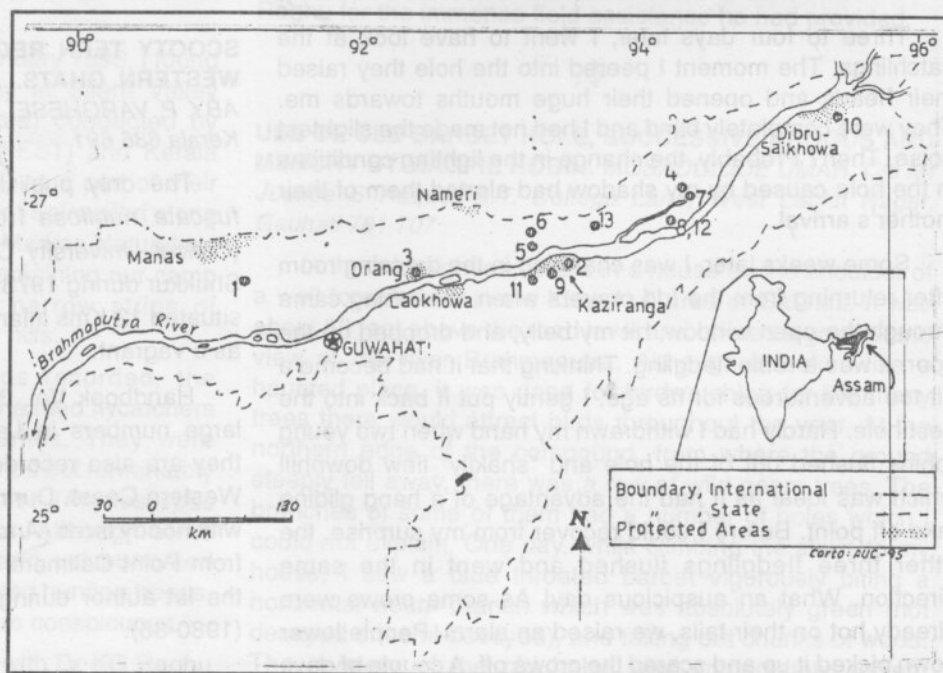
- Handbook of birds of India and Pakistan, Salim Ali and S.D. Ripley : 3,62
- Pictorial guide to the birds of Indian Subcontinent, Salim Ali & S.D. Ripley : 46 (16)
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STATUS OF THE WOOLLY-NECKED STORK IN ASSAM, INDIA. DR. ANWARUDDIN CHOUDHURY, The Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India, C/o The Assam Co., Ltd., Girish Bordoloi Path, Bamunimaidam, Guwahati 781 021, Assam, India

The woolly-necked stork (*Ciconia episcopus*) is also known as the white-necked stork. The species is regarded as resident in India (Ali & Ripley, 1983) and in Assam also the species was thought to be resident (Choudhury, 1990). However, subsequent field work suggests that the bird moves locally depending upon habitat suitability. The white-necked stork is nowhere common although sightings are common in protected areas like Kaziranga National Park. I here list all the sightings recorded by me during the last decade while working in the field in different parts of Assam (Table). Table shows that two birds are the most common group-size.

Except for Kaziranga and Orang, the species occurs sporadically in rest of Assam. Even in Dibru-Saikhowa Sanctuary, the stork seems to be an occasional visitor as during a field survey from July, 1992 and May, 1994, I did not see a single bird which is an indications to that.

The white-necked stork is not particularly threatened, however; loss of habitat, occasional poaching, use of pesticide in the cultivations, are the threats which it faces in common with other water birds. A survey to find out whether the species breeds anywhere in Assam, especially in Kaziranga and Orang, is recommended.



Map of Assam showing the recorded localities of *C. episcopus*. Numbers refer to the Table.

Table : Field Observations on Woolly-necked Stork in Assam

Sl.No.	Date	Location	No. of Birds	Habitat	Remarks
1.	5-3-1986	Near Pathsala, barpeta District	2	Roadside ditch	Near a busy highway
2.	29-1-1988	Sohola <i>beel</i> , Kaziranga Nat. Park	2	Edge of large open <i>beel</i>	
3.	21-1-1989	Satsimolu <i>beel</i> , Orang Sanctuary	2	Marsh with tall elephant grass at the edge	
4.	6-2-1990	Ghahibari, Dhakuakhana Sub-division, Lakhimpur Dist.	2	Grassland	In association with 26 black storks.
5.	17-5-1990	Near Biswanath Charali, Sonitpur Dist.	3	Open field	In association with a few lesser adjutant
6.	14-9-1990	Mijikajan Tea Estate, Sonitpur Dist.	2	Degraded forest surrounded by tea plantation.	Perched in tree
7.	30-1-1991	Bali-Dewrigaon, Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur Dist.	1	Countryside with marshes and channels	Perched in tree.
8.	30-1-1991	Between Gormur and Kamalabari, Majuli Sub-division, Jorhat Dist.	2	Countryside with marshes and channels	Perched in a <i>Bombax ceiba</i> tree
9.	27-6-1993	Near Kohora, outside Kaziranga National Park, Golaghat Dist.	2	Open field	Foraging
10.	November 1993	Near Kolomy, Dibrusaikhowa Sanctuary, Tinsukia Dist.	a few	Near a forest pool	Largest flocking recorded in India (Asif Hazarika, pers. comm.; photos seen by me).
11.	Summer 1994	Near Bagori, outside Kaziranga Nat. Park. Nagaon Dist.	2	Open field at the edge of hills	In flight (circling). A few lesser adjutant also circling. A few lesser adjutant also circling
12.	21-11-1994	Between Gormur and Kamalabari, Majuli, Jorhat Dist.	2	Countryside with marshes and channels	Perched in tree
13	June, 1994	Near Gohpur, Sonitpur Dist.	3	Open field	(Kulajyoti Lahkar, pers. comm.)

Beel Lakes, ox-bow lakes, depressions with pool and marshes, etc., are locally called *beel* in eastern India and *jheel* in northern India.

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Correspondence

**THE WHITEWINGED TIT *Parus nuchalis* IN SOUTHERN INDIA
and NOTES ON THE GREAT TIT *Parus major*. L. SHYAMAL,
E-18, I.I.Sc. Campus, Bangalore 560 012**

"I obtained this well marked species of tit from the Eastern Ghats West of Nellore. The shikarees who brought it to me said that it was rare. It has since been obtained by Dr. Stewart from a tope of trees near Bangalore...."

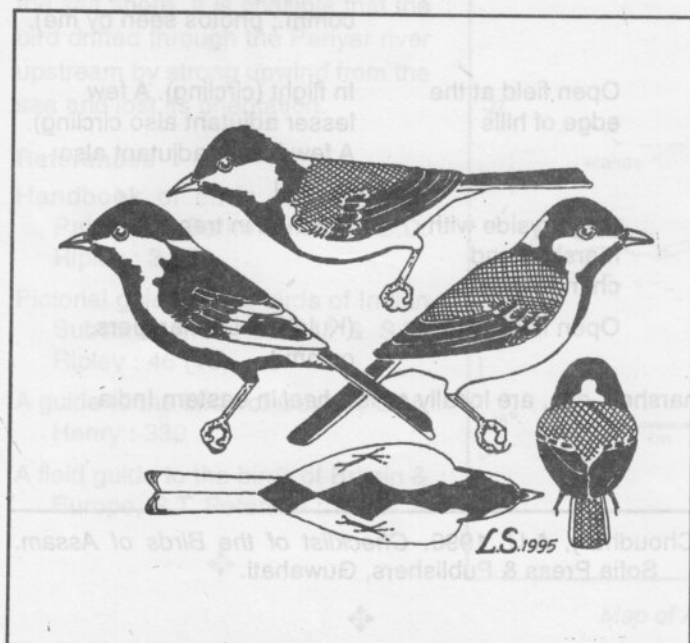
— T.C. Jerdon

On a recent trip to Vishakapatnam, I looked out for this species in and around the city, in the zoo premises, Simhachalam (which has the habitat described by Stuart Baker - Tops of wooded hills.) and also from the train (which moved at a pace that only a birdwatcher could appreciate) but it was all in vain. I have found only two recent reports of this tit in Southern India, both from the Kaveri valley 100 km south of Bangalore, where too I have failed to see it. Interestingly all specimens of the whitewinged tit in the BNHS are from Kutch, Western India. It appears that this tit is much rarer than suggested by 'Jerdon's Shikarees'. The whitewinged tit sketch is of a Kutch specimen in the BNHS. It is to be seen if 1000 kilometres of separation has led to any visible differences. Some of the specimens show some buff on the flanks, which I was told was due to ageing. Salim Ali in his Birds of Gujarat states that breeding males carry much yellow on the flanks.

Great tits *Parus major* show a lot of variation in the amount of black. The top sketch is from a newsletter coverphoto (Vol.32,9-10) of a breeding adult with a white vent. The underside view is of an adult, which was displaying, with a completely black vent (undertail coverts). The great tit facing right is an immature which had a rounded tail, incomplete 'chin-strap' and a curiously shaped white patch on the nape. Adult great tits also have a white nape which should not be confused with the nuchal patch of *Parus nuchalis* which I found to be smaller than shown in most illustrations.

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**A RARE OCCURRENCE OF THE GLOBALLY THREATENED
WHITE- NAPED TIT, *PARUS NUCHALIS*, IN AREAS OF
DHARWAD, KARNATAKA, INDIA. DR. J.C. UTTANGI, H.No. 36/1,
Mission Compound, DHARWAD 580 001.**

In the back-yard of our house at Dharwad, located in the transitional belt of Tropical Thorn Forest edge, facing the Pune-Bangalore High way, between 15°.25'N and 75°.00'E and an altitude of nearly 2400 feet MSL, few trees like Mango, Chikku, Mulberry, Coconut, Guava (Peru) including the Curry-leaf plant (Kadipatta) *Murraya koenigi* planted nearly 20 years ago still attract a variety of birds, butterflies and insects. The two clumps of *Loranthus* pest which appeared recently on the Guava tree are attracting both the flowerpeckers namely the thickbilled & Tickell's flowerpecker including the purplerumped sunbird. One more attraction to birds is the tall Mulberry tree, the succulent fruits of which draw the attention of koel & coppersmith barbet and occasionally the Brahminy & the greyheaded mynas. The two regular winter visitor to the backyard are, the redbreasted flycatcher and the grey shrike. They are frequently seen feeding near the Chikku tree. Those that occupy the Mango tree are, white eye, iora, redwhiskered bulbul, redvented bulbul, tailor-bird, ashy wren warbler, the grey tit, magpie robin and one or two stray wanderers. This obviously serves to indicate that in a landscape where trees exist that can be of value to birds, whether they are in a backyard, or in the front-garden, or a corridor of trees along roads, or hedges grown around a city garden, or even a piece of useless patchy grassland in the urbans filled with garbage, here we always find birds, one or the other and sometimes suddenly a species with a particular assigned value. Managing landscape and conservation of natural habitats in all places where birds are found, therefore, is of utmost importance in these days of urban and industrial expansion.

On 11 September 1995, at about 4.30 p.m., I heard some musical notes emerging out from the Mango tree of the back-yard and somewhat reluctantly went with my 8 x 40 (field 6.5") Superzenith, Light Weight Binocular to check and see if anything interesting could be noticed. At first, I saw a tailor-bird. With its tail held upwards it was hopping from one branch of the tree to another branch. Very close to it but, on another dried up branch I saw two black and white tits. One of them, hanging upside down was pecking at the dried end of the twig. In this position, it was showing its broad jet black band which ran straight from chin to flank without touching the cheek area. The white outer wing feather and a white patch on the nape were additional pointers which went to show that the bird was not a grey tit but, a member of the white-naped tit, *Parus nuchalis* which had locally migrated into our Dharwad areas. Ali and Ripley (1987) have named it as whitewinged black tit and while describing its range say that the species is patchily distributed in Northern Gujarat but also found in Eastern Ghats west of Nellore including one record from Bangalore in Southern India. This is the 3rd record of a globally threatened species of tit to be made from the semiarid region of Dharwad in South India and the second one is from the buffer zone of Anashi National Park in North Western Ghats (1994 Survey sponsored by OBC). Since the tit species is restricted to India and not found anywhere else, its conservation measures need consideration on top priority basis. Salim Ali who first saw the bird in 1943 near Buj in a hole of a cross-bar gate had marked it with an aluminium ring to test its movements. He could not

get any results. It would be an interesting study to venture upon the breeding behaviour and trends of distribution of the species in Southern India.

OCCURRENCE OF THE RUFOUSVENTED PRINIA (*Prinia burnesii*) IN PABITORA WILDLIFE SANCTURAY, ASSAM.

MAAN BARUA, 107, "Barua Bhavan", M.C. Road Uzan Bazar,
Guwahati, Assam - 780 001.

On 13 February 1994 I observed a rufousvented prinia (*Prinia burnesii*) when visiting Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary (26°12' - 36°15'N to 92°2' - 92°5'E), Assam. The observation was made from 15h30 to 15h40 on the western boundary of the sanctuary near the range office at 15-25 m above MSL. The bird, observed at a distance of 6-7 m, was foraging among some grass. The weather was clear with the sun behind my back.

Notes were taken and the bird described as follows : size and shape like that of plain prinia (*Prinia subflava*); brownish-green crown, nape, wings, and back with thin black stripes ; narrow supercillium pale white ; throat, breast, belly and vent off-white with a greyish tinge ; flanks grey ; tail greenish-brown ; bill blackish-yellow ; and iris dark.

I consulted Ali & Ripley (1983b) on the spot and identified it as a rufousvented prinia. The bird was of the eastern subspecies *cinerascens*. The chances of it being the similar graceful prinia (*Prinia gracilis*) were ruled out as it had a greenish-brown (*v. white tipped*) tail and grey flanks (*v. pale brown*).

The habitat in which the bird was seen is a grass land (comprising of *Phragmites karka*, *Erianthus ravannae*, *Arundo donax*, etc) in the vicinity of a wetland. The sanctuary is a part of the Brahmaputra floodplain and most of the area is flooded during the monsoon.

This is the first record of the rufousvented prinia for Pabitora WLS. This species has two disjunct populations, in the plains of the Indus in Pakistan and adjacent north-west India, and the plains of

the Brahmaputra river in north-east India and Bangladesh. The eastern population was formerly common, but with a few recent published records. It is threatened by the destruction and modification of its grassland and wetland habitat (Collar *et al.* 1994).

The presence of rufousvented prinia indicates the quality of grasslands in Pabitora WLS. These grasslands should be surveyed for it is likely to hold many more endangered species.

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DISTRIBUTION OF THE GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER IN THE WESTERN GHATS. Lt. Gen. B.C. NANDA (Retd.), Coorg Wildlife Society, General Thimaya Circle, Madikeri 571 201, Kodagu, Karnataka

We would like to report that the Indian great black woodpecker (*Dryocopus javensis*) has been sighted by our members on several occasions in the area of Valnoor (where our Society has a fishing hut). This place is on the banks of River Cauvery in Kodagu District and immediately on the far bank is the Dubari Reserved Forest.

The recorded sighting has been done by Ms. Nalini Cariappa on 5- 2-1994. Unfortunately other members have not recorded the date on which they have sighted the bird.

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Always Mention !

COMMENTS ON SOME CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEWSLETTER. LAVKUMAR KHACHER, 646, Vastunirman, Gandhinagar 382 022

As always I am happy to receive my copy of the NEWSLETTER. Yesterday 25th September there was one in the mail and I started leafing through it. To my chagrin I found as though time had stood still or rather had gone backwards for I was reading what I had apparently already read - it was the May-June 1995 issue!

Any way, I have two comments to make on what a couple of friends have written in this issue. First, Dilhas Jaffri's record of the pied harrier. Dilhas has some good bird photographs and makes it a point to come and show me his achievements from time to time. The pied harrier was distinct. I am not sure whether he has sent a note for the BNHS Journal. If not, I suggest he does so along with a copy of the photograph for publishing in the Journal.

Just following Dilhas note is one by my young friend Hillaljiyoti from Assam (Actually there are two). Mynahs, like sparrows and a number of other hole nesting passerines invariably line their nests with soft material if available and feathers are very popular. I have a pair of common and another of Brahminy mynas and both, if they can, carry feathers in. The common stuffs paper and pieces of rags into the nest cavity quite meaninglessly it would seem. The greyheaded myna is very closely related to the Brahminy. This observation needs further commenting on. Young Hillal should realise that Salim Ali and Ripley are not the last word - they provide a baseline which incidentally rests on observations of earlier birdwatchers and Salim Ali himself typified this; when watching bayas nest, he discovered their polyandrous customs. He himself told me a very interesting story of how in his early days got into a controversy with the then legendary Hugh Whistler. It seems birdmen believed that the pennants at the tip of the racquets of the racquet-tailed drongo were formed by the - whatever they are called - on the outside of the rachis of the long tail feathers. Salim Ali had found that the long rachis actually was twisted and so the "whatever they are" are on the inner side, but twisted to appear on the outside.

Similarly I have added a little to bird knowledge by pointing out that blackheaded oriole males are a richer golden colour than the females and based on this observable difference found that it is the female alone who builds the nest, the male merely flying around following her - quite stupidly really, because his liquid calls draw attention to the nest building activities! The point to emphasise is that we have still a great deal to learn and so careful notes must be made (this is the difference between an ornithologist and a casual birdwatcher) and even more important, observations recorded in a publication of some recognised Society like the BNHS.

Hillal's second observation pertaining to predation by greater adjutant storks should not cause surprise - though what he saw must be recorded - because storks, do capture large live creatures and so for carrion feeders, graduating from animals, to sick, wounded and so to some less wary creature would be logical. Infact, I have seen photographs of a maribou stork in East Africa capture, kill and attempt to swallow a lesser flamingo! Hillal should keep a sharp look out and maintain detailed notes not only for his scientific research but also to share interesting, exciting and often beautiful moments with other less fortunate birdwatchers.

Reference to BIRDS AT ASAN BARAJ, I would like to question the authors as to the "four months, regular observation" commencing from 1st November, or were the four months spread over the year. If the former, observations at the BARRAGE (not BARAJ?) would have been restricted to the winter season and so, the resident status of several of the species could be questionable. The authors may like to make further inquiries about the following :

- Pariah kite *Milvus migrans govinda* the common, resident, plains subspecies is recognisable from, and during the cool season shares space with the larger and rather darker blackeared kite *M.m. lineatus*. But the latter would not be resident as this would suggest that the two subspecies are nesting near Dehra Dun which would make them into distinct species! *M.m. lineatus* moves higher into the mountains during summer.
- Greater spotted eagle *Aquila clanga* if resident and breeding should be carefully observed. A few pairs may breed with us but the large majority arrive as winter visitors. Breeding raptors, particularly the large eagles need monitoring since they are all on the decline.

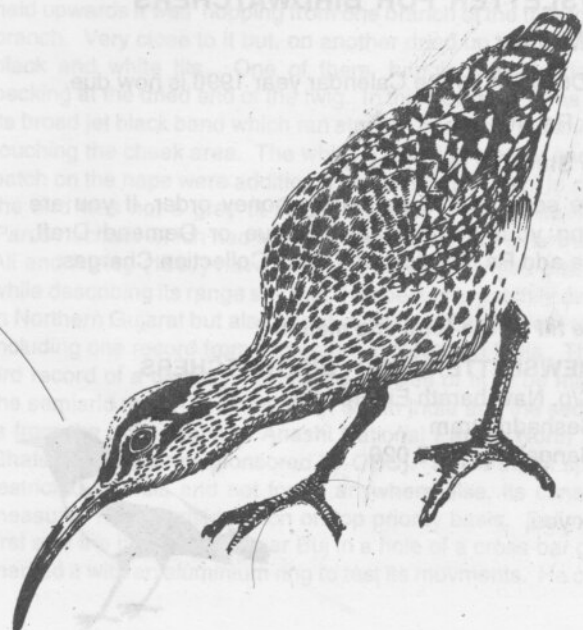
Newsletter Calling

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- Avocet *Recurvirostra avocetta* is surely a winter visitor around Dehra Dun.
- The swift *Apus apus* cannot be resident. During summer it is a high altitude swift.
- Swallow *Hirundo rustica* breeds in Himalayan Valleys. Whether it does so in the Doon valley needs confirmation.
- House martin *Delichon urbica*. This is a high altitude, summer breeding bird. Even its winter status needs more observation.
- Verditer flycatcher *Muscicapa thalassina*. Breeds in summer above 1,200 mts along the Himalayas. In winter spreads across India to the South.
- Plumbeous redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus*. A summer breeding species along the Himalayan streams about 1,000 mts and winters along the base of the mountains. An altitudinal migrant.
- Whitecapped redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*. Another altitudinal migrant wintering along the base of the Himalayas. Summers well above 1500 mts.
- Wagtails. Only the large pied wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis* is a resident. All the others are winter visitors. The forest wagtail *M. indica* needs confirmation.

The observations by Vivek Gharpure page 78, NL Vol. 35, No. 4 July/August 1995 call for comments. Several years ago I had been staying as a house guest at a bungalow atop the hill south of the lake at Bhopal, M.P. Looking down at the water one saw a wooded island from which half a dozen little egret *Egretta garzetta* would fly out low over the water attempting from time to time to jab at fish shoals near the surface. The birds would fly aimlessly over the lake returning to the trees before setting off on another sortie. This went on for quite sometime. How successful they were in capturing the fish is something I cannot say. Very often egrets do chase after a shoal in clear water and take to the wing where the water gets deep. Egrets running about in water after visible prey is quite common; taking to wing presumably would be the next step.

All members of the swallow family readily settle on the ground and can alight and take off with ease. When it is remembered that most *Hirundo* nests are 'built' of mud pellets, seeing swallows on the ground should not occasion the sort of surprise indicated. The question is, were the swallows feeding on emergent insects or were they collecting mud pellets - if the latter, they would not be *Hirundo rustica* but more probably, as indicated by the guest editor, *H. daurica*.

Regarding sunbirds piercing the bases of corollas to get at the nectar, over my patio here, I have *Thunbergia grandiflora* with large, pendant clusters of blue flowers. Purple sunbirds *Nectarinia asiatica* (alas! the only sunbird occurring here) are on continual attendance invariably piercing the base - each flower has a neat hole. *T. grandiflora* flowers are tailor made for pollination by the large, common bumble bees.

In making these comments, my intentions are to tell Vivek Gharpure to most certainly make such observations and to share them with the rest of us.



FIFTEEN YEARS AND STILL GOING STRONG. M.S. KULKARNI, State Bank of Hyderabad, Hyderabad

On 29th October I was one of the members of the Bird Watchers Society of A.P. visiting Shamirpet Deer Park and the lake. 20 km. away from Hyderabad City.

We have been visiting this site since the last fifteen years and we can confirm that the place is being encroached upon by stone cutters (vaddars) and stone crushing machines. One large hospital is also established here catering to the needs of the "creamy" layer of society.

Here a hundred acres of land has been under the A.P. forest dept. and a deer park is maintained overlooking the lake. The area is full of big rocks, and inside the deer park, there are rock formations one above the other. In these rocks an Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) has been nesting for the last fifteen years. The life span of this vulture is 80 years. Every year, the pair raises a single chick or some times two chicks.

It is a delight to see this bird for the past so many years at Shamirpet Deerpark amongst the fast changing environment.



WHITE STORKS IN BELGAUM CITY. N.R. SANT, 27, Adarsh nagar, Wadgaon, Belgaum 590 005

On 5th September 95 I saw 9 large birds flying over my head. I could identify them as white storks *Ciconia ciconia* from their black primaries, red legs and red bill.

On the 8th morning I got a call from a young friend, who told me about some big white birds near his house in a paddy field. To my surprise there were 13 white storks quietly moving in a wet rice field. I took some snaps.

I had seen these birds way back in December 1985 near the railway track south of Belgaum.

The birds remained there for two weeks. I watched them regularly. One bird was limping heavily and later I got news from a farmer that the wounded bird was eaten by local dogs.



NEED FOR A NEW GUIDE BOOK. WERNER W.K. PETERS, Member of Singapore Nature Society, Bird Group, 135, Sunset Way #10-05, Singapore 597 158

As a German working and living in Singapore I am not only familiarizing myself with the beautiful world of Southeast Asian birds but also trying to get a glimpse of the extraordinary avifauna of the great Indian Subcontinent, though primarily through literature.

Thus Bikram Grewal's "Birds of India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka" was a most welcome addition to my bird library.

Frankly, it was the advertisement of "superb" photographs which lured me to instantly buy this book. Unfortunately, the photographs turned out to be the weakest point of the publication. Other shortcomings have been rightly pointed out by your readers Manu Prasanna and Pavan Nagaraj (Vol. 34 No. 2) and, therefore, need no further comment here.

I believe that birders all over the world would highly welcome a new edition which would eradicate these shortcomings. After having seen a number of your Newsletters with really superb photographs of Indian birds on their cover pages, I am positive that this goal could be achieved by pooling the best photographic shots of the great number of excellent Indian bird photographers and having them incorporated in such new edition.



Review

ENVIRONMENT AND ORNITHOLOGY IN INDIA. PRAKASH GÖLE, Rawat Publications, Jaipur 302 004, 262 Pages, Rs. 400/-. Review by Laeeq Futehally

This book is packed with the lifetime's experience of bird-based practical conservation.

Like most birdwatchers, Prakash Gole quickly moved from Ornithology to Conservation. His brand of conservation is of an extremely pragmatic kind; how to deal with officials and bureaucrats; how to plan for the restoration of wastelands; how to create Bird Sanctuaries, and above all, how to implement these plans. He keeps careful financial accounts of his "growing" activities, as well as detailed profit and loss accounts of his successes and failures. And, unlike most people, Prakash Gole does not believe in glossing over his failures. Indeed, it is the failures which often drive home the most important lessons. This makes the present book doubly useful as a handbook for all conservationists who are trying to work on the ground. It is interesting that, after much effort and hard work, the final conclusion is simple : Control the cattle population and leave Nature alone.

Birds are, of course, the best indicators of the health and status of any area, and it is not surprising that Gole the ornithologist can see so deeply into ecological and conservation problems. The chapters on Management of Bird Sanctuaries, Managing a Man-made Tropical Wetland; Birds of a Polluted River; Birds of Deforested Hills, are scientific, complete and insightful reports with tables, graphs and sketches.

As we all know Mr. Gole is an authority on Cranes and four chapters are devoted to Cranes - three of them to the Black-necked crane, whose future is a reason for special concern. Even their Ladakh breeding grounds are not safe from human interference; while as for the Sarus Crane, "the tallest flying bird in the world" which used to be so common a few years ago, we are told that "it is not faring well". This statement is followed, as always, with accurate and concrete facts and analyses.

At Rs. 400/- per copy, this book might not be easily available to every birdwatcher. But it is an investment which should be made every conservation-minded NGO group as a text book.



Announcements

WILDERNESS INDIA Research Expedition. DR. KUMAR GHORPADE

Volunteer Naturalists can join the WILDERNESS INDIA RESEARCH EXPEDITIONS teams doing biodiversity surveys in peninsular India. They will share costs and be trained to assist research scientists to complete ongoing projects, mainly on bird and insect faunas, with an eye on the floras, of selected ecosystems.

Interested participants (or sponsors) are requested to write to Dr. Kumar Ghorpade, P.O. Box, 8439, Bangalore 560 084 (or Fax 080-546 3378) for more details of participation or sponsorship, and for application forms.



SALIM ALI INTERNATIONAL AWARD FOR NATURE CONSERVATION. BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The Salim Ali International Award for Nature Conservation is expected to be one of the most prestigious conservation awards in the world. It is proposed to be awarded to an individual of any nationality for outstanding contribution and achievement in the field of protection, management and conservation of natural resources including population, wildlife, pollution and hazardous materials control, education, information and legislation.

The biannual award is of Rs. 1,00,000/- and citation. For further details contact : The Director, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Dr. Salim Ali Chowk, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Bombay 400 023, India, Phone : 2843869-2843421, Fax : (91-22) 2837615

Nominations for the award related credentials and information in support of the nomination and letters of reference must be received no later than **29 February 1996**.



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Cover : **White Eye** (*Zosterops palpebrosa*). This restless tiny olive green bird has a marked preference for gardens and hill jungles close to cultivation. Found in small parties always on the move, making pleasing jingling notes *cheen... cheen*. These birds help in pollination of many flowering plants. The male white eye renders a short melodious warbling song from a favorite perch during the breeding season.

Photo - S. Sridhar, ARPS